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## Spying—American Style

MOST thoughtful Americans, we imagine, recognize that the nature of the world in today's Thermonuclear Age dictates that this nation operate a large, secret agency devoted to the extensive collection and analysis of foreign intelligence. National security and self-preservation demand that this be done.

Still, the uncomfortable feeling persists that such covert activity is somehow incompatible with the democratic principles of an open society such as ours.

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IT MAY BE of some comfort to know that those who run America's foreign intelligence network acknowledge that incongruity, and say they wish such work were not necessary, although they are deeply convinced, of course, that it is.

Richard Helms, director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, said as much in a recent speech in Washington to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The CIA's leaders, he said, "understand as well as anyone the difficulties and the contradictions of conducting foreign intelligence operations on behalf of a free society." Mr. Helms acknowledged that he had no "easy answer to the objections raised by those who consider intelligence work incompatible with democratic principles."

But since the essential need for secrecy precludes the CIA's going into its myriad operations in detail with the public, about all it can do to assuage the public's misgivings is to ask the citizenry to accept, on faith, official assurances that America's superpies are good and honorable men devoted to her service and undesirous of seeing their work distort her values and principles.

That is just what Mr. Helms did, assuring his listeners that the CIA

wishes "to adapt intelligence to American society, not vice versa."

Such assurances are worth enough — when added to a dime — to get you what used to be a nickel candy-bar.

But while the U.S. public at present must accept such assurances solely on faith, the U.S. government does not. Contrary to what some citizens apparently believe, there is an extensive system of governmental checks and controls over the CIA's organization, operations, plans and budget. As noted by Mr. Helms, they include supervision by such diverse groups as the National Security Council, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, the Office of Management and Budget, and no fewer than four congressional committees.

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IT MAY BE that closer supervision — especially in the area of CIA-sponsored foreign military operations and other covert activities far removed from pure intelligence-gathering — is needed. It may be that Congress should exert greater control over what our spy agency may and may not do. But to suggest that the shadowy CIA today stands apart, unchecked, its own master, is grossly misleading and unfair.

Somehow, the fact of Mr. Helms' appearance before the nation's newspaper editors and his long (if not detailed) discussion of the CIA's role and responsibilities is in itself mildly comforting. A public appearance by such an official before a large group of private citizens would be unheard of in practically any other free Western nation, let alone a totalitarian state. Even in Britain, it would be unthinkable, since the public there is not allowed to know even the identity of its intelligence chief.

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